

THE PROMISE OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE LANDMARK FORUM*

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“Once upon a time, philosophy promised more than simply contents of thought,” writes Robert Nozick in his Introduction to *The Examined Life*.¹ What beyond contents of thought could philosophy possibly promise?

We know from personal experience that over time our knowledge, which can be considered “contents of thought,” grows. Yet we realize that many of our problems and sufferings can be traced to inadequate knowledge. Moreover, at times we are aware that we are not open to new knowledge, knowledge that would make a difference in the quality of our lives. This awareness of how closed or open we are to knowledge may be our most important knowledge. Access to new knowledge, and not simply the contents of thought, is one of the more important promises of philosophy.

Not surprisingly this leads us to Socrates who extols the virtues of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge changes how we act and think, and leads us to wisdom. Socrates urges Charmides “to examine both what he knows and what he does not.” (167a3-4).² Examining what we do not know entails not only discovering what we know we do not know—e.g. How to caramelize onions or steer a submarine—it also, and more enticingly, entails discovering what we do not know that we do not know. Exploring and confronting this doubled unknown are basic to the original promise and practice of philosophy.

Such inquiry requires dialogue, because alone we cannot see what we cannot see. It takes another person—as coach, teacher, mentor, therapist, or philosopher—to guide us to recognize and acknowledge the limitations of our own multi-layered ignorance. Knowledge of self, Socrates shows, requires guidance.

Today philosophy resides primarily in the university and on the printed page, where academic approaches focus on “contents of thought,” to reuse Nozick’s phrase, rather than on self-knowledge. This is not to suggest that Socratic dialogue is not practiced at all in university settings, but to say that academic philosophy seldom makes self-knowledge its over-riding concern. The purpose of this paper is to reexamine, through a contemporary approach, the promise of philosophy as the practical art of uncovering and expanding self-knowledge and thereby generating unforeseen ways of being in everyday life.

We describe a contemporary experience of Socratic philosophy in-the-making provided by an employee-owned, private educational organization, Landmark Educational Corporation. Its introductory program, called The Landmark Forum, brings philosophy practically into a person’s life.³ It is a three and one-half day course in which trained leaders, in the Socratic tradition, challenge conventional thinking, discursively examine the nature of human nature, and facilitate participants’ explorations of their lives. The method, format and style are Socratic (it is good theatre), but the discourse itself reflects a systematic and accessible integration of Eastern and Western philosophies.

Our thesis is that the Landmark Forum constitutes a return to the original roots of philosophy, to the examined life, to philosophy in action as Socrates envisioned. Participants in this inquiry examine the human condition in a way that leads them to self-knowledge, to new levels of responsibility, and to reformed

and revitalized commitments. In drawing attention to the Landmark Forum one of our purposes is to invite a discussion of its value for higher education. Would it be beneficial if college curricula included more courses like the Landmark Forum?

Review of Literature on the Landmark Forum

Perhaps because the Landmark Forum does not take place where philosophy is formally taught—in academia—it has not been extensively examined, analyzed, written about, or even experienced by philosophers themselves. There is much about the Landmark Forum in the popular press ranging from articles in *Teen* to *The New Yorker*.⁴ There are reports of surveys showing that nearly all participants experience positive results.⁵ Some participants are more philosophical in their responses; they describe a shift in being, expansion of experience, and recreating of priorities.⁶ Dennison's dissertation,⁷ which categorizes the Landmark Forum as a "large group awareness training" is a qualitative study based on interviews with Forum graduates. He also reports predominantly positive outcomes and in addition, briefly summarizes philosophical components of the Forum. The extensive research literature on "large group awareness training" published in the 1970s and 80s (summarized in Finkelstein, Wenegrat, and Yalom⁸) is framed in psychological more than philosophical terms, albeit there is some reference to the training as existential psychotherapy. Finally, two published case studies, by Wruck and Eastley and by Logan,⁹ describe Landmark's work with individuals and organizations, respectively.

None of the studies cited above, however, focuses specifically on the philosophical origins and qualities of the Landmark Forum. One exception is Bartley,¹⁰ whose work includes much of the philosophy that informed the *est* training, the program that preceded and is precursor to the Forum. His book, though now dated, is useful as background material for this paper.

Marinoff describes a relatively new and growing field called "philosophical counseling," which originated in the 1980s by German philosopher Gerd Achenback and is now practiced by Marinoff and other academic philosophers.¹¹ Their work is similar to that of Landmark in that it applies philosophical wisdom to individual and group problems. Their selection of philosophies, however, is eclectic and case-based as opposed to Landmark's systematic and unified program, and their format is, like therapy, a one-on-one encounter between client and philosopher. The Landmark Forum, in contrast, is initially an assembly and eventually a community based on inquiry.

To describe the philosophy underlying the Landmark Forum, we first note that the actual language used in the dialogue reflects a distinctive paradigm. Words are used rigorously but not necessarily with their ordinary, familiar meanings so as to present a set of related "distinctions" that propel the process of inquiry. These "distinctions" of the Forum, include but are not limited to: *possibility*, *story/interpretation*, *authenticity-inauthenticity*, *empty and meaningless*, *transformation*, *language and being*, *integrity*, and even the word *distinction* itself. Each is explained in context.

As these distinctions are discussed in the Forum the purpose is not to "understand" them, as in being able to write about them as we are doing in this paper. The emphasis is on living by the insights distinctions provide.

The distinction *possibility*

We take up first, as the Landmark Forum does, the art of "distinguishing." This word—"distinguishing"—names the act by which something hitherto not even noticed, let alone known, is called into being with appropriate language. The ability to distinguish is critical because it is the access to what we don't know that we don't know. If, for example, I think that I have to be funny/clever to be accepted by others as a valid human being, then that is how I will be—funny/clever. Realizing this about myself is a practical insight into what Heidegger calls "throwness."¹² When I am able to distinguish that I habitually strive, however inadvertently, to gain acceptance via my humor or cleverness, then, and only then, am I no longer completely embedded in doing so and am thereby freed enough to consider giving it up for something more fulfilling.

Why would I want to give up what has made me acceptable? That is the challenge and risk participants in the Landmark Forum face. How would it be if I take that risk? How will I be in the moment of letting it go? I will be however I am when I am not proving myself. Here, then, is the beginning—albeit a kernel—of self-awareness and the experience of a certain kind of unexpected freedom. In the act of

distinguishing our ways of being, and seeing them as such, we crack open our “thrown” or already given humanity. In the absence of such distinctions we live more or less automatically and unquestioningly; what is not known remains not known. Distinguishing different ways of being recurs throughout the Forum.

This brings us to the distinction, *possibility*. Possibility is not used in the ordinary sense; it does not refer to something that could or might happen. Rather, it is used in a way reminiscent of Heidegger, as a clearing for a new way of being. Possibility is both defined and distinguished as a phenomenon occurring now in present time, not in the future. When possibility is present, experience, expectations, and perspective open or are freed up; to follow the earlier personal example, I experience directly that I can give up my attachment to being funny/clever.

The distinction *possibility* is integral to literally everything that happens in the Forum. Its use is multi-layered. We will elaborate its meaning and significance as we consider each new distinction.

Story/Interpretation.

Suppose that you are asked to tell in five minutes the story of your life. After doing so, you are asked, “Who are you?” In response to this question you would no doubt refer to the content of the story you just told. You are likely to do so, as we all are, because we normally become so identified with both our collective and personal stories that we see reality and describe ourselves in terms of them. They become like water is to a fish, habitual paradigms that go unnoticed. We unconsciously identify with them, and they constitute who we think we are—our opinions, feelings, thoughts, judgments, justifications. Ordinarily, the building of stories and the forming of identity go hand in hand and go on and on without awareness.

Yet beyond the “you” that exists as a character in your story, there is you, the author or source of the story—the one who may live to revise the story endlessly. The Forum suggests, as a possibility and not as some unquestionable truth, that you consider that you are the latter, the teller or source of the story. And as such, you are *distinct* and thereby not simply reducible to the content of the story. Nor are you ever simply reducible to your thoughts. And so, in distinguishing *story* you also distinguish who you are — as the one who speaks and can say how things are, no longer simply a character contained inside habitual ways of telling about yourself. You can now glimpse beyond the dramatic narratives with which you, without awareness, formerly identified. You begin to realize that you can stand outside your own slim story. Again, you now know something you didn't know that you didn't know.

When one is able to distinguish story as story, some obstacle or confusion to self-understanding is removed. This shift in perspective happens when Forum participants consider the hold their stories have on them and focus specifically on the difference between “what happened” in their lives and their interpretation of “what happened.” As an example, consider this scenario: I stop by my friends' house on a Sunday morning while they're having breakfast. They don't invite me to join them. In an instant I decide they do not like me. I *know* they do not like me. What actually happened is that they didn't invite me to join them. My interpretation or story (that they don't like me) normally would become the reality I would begin to live in and from which I would relate to them in the future.

Forum participants are asked to ask themselves, “In the absence of my interpretation of what happened, what simply happened?” My friends continued to eat their breakfast in my presence. Instead of thinking they don't like me, I could consider a less personally defeating or more practical interpretation (they were in the midst of an argument) or a more creative one (they were on the verge of foreplay.) I could even consider a more Zen-like interpretation—my friends didn't invite me to join them because they didn't invite me to join them.

One might ask, though, what if your friends *really* don't like you and you, with your made-up, now rosy interpretations, are ignoring or denying reality? This is where life, the Forum and philosophy meet. For the issue is the nature of reality. In ordinary life we don't think about the nature of reality when someone snubs us. In the Forum that is precisely what is done. In essence, “snub” is appreciated as a human creation. As a creation then, it can be recreated. As one continues to distinguish story, the question inevitably arises, why live shackled by self-defeating, interpretations when one could generate more thoughtful and empowering—even exciting—ones?

We learn that some interpretations work better than others. Meanings that are laced with righteousness, resentment and resignation—regardless of supporting evidence—can often be counter

productive. They pull one out of living in the present. They attribute causality to others and to external situations. They limit freedom, squelch aliveness, and constrain social interactions. In Forum terms, there is no possibility. In the case of the breakfast interruptus, the friendship is either tainted or ends.

If, in a kitchen in my own neighborhood with my own friends I could, in a single morning, so easily lose them, what can we infer about a lifetime replete with interpretations from the past, invented at various times from the perspective of a child, a teenager, an adult. When “stories” rule the day, there is little freedom for anything else. Moreover, humans enrich their stories with significance and become attached to them. That attachment keeps us small, defended, and protective. However, there is more to this probe than just understanding the notion “story.” The inquiry addresses the nature of human nature, with the ensuing, specific assertion that as humans, we are “meaning making machines.” This is dramatically demonstrated in the Forum as participants chime in with fresh realizations from their own lives.

There are, of course, volumes of writing and speculation about the nature of human nature. Much of it focuses on the nature-nurture debate, while some of it argues that human nature is open-ended and infinitely adaptable. Discovering how bound we are by our stories and their significant meanings leads us to conclude that this meaning-making proclivity is an important element in the nature of human nature.

Creating new interpretations for the past as well as the present does not come easily for several reasons. First, one must recognize one's automatic, taken-for-granted interpretations for what they are, interpretations. When something feels “real,” to recognize such “realities” as interpretations requires discipline. Second, we live inside defined cultures and subcultures that have any number of fixed and accepted paradigms that contribute to that culture's identity. They are the already-given, taken-for-granted assumptions about which there is much agreement. Then, we act as if we are at the mercy of our own cultures. In other words, humans create social realities and then literally forget that they created them (Berger and Luckman¹³). Further, we are not taught to practice the art of consciously, intentionally creating meanings that have possibility. And, once created, we have little practice maintaining them, especially in the face of widespread skepticism and resignation. We address this practice in a later section.

Self as “The Transparent I”

Returning to you as the source of the story of your life: if you are asked, “Are you in the story or outside of it?” you could say “both.” You are in the story for you are described in it, but you are outside of it, for you are its author. The story is like footprints, evidence that the “I” has appeared. But the story is not the authorial “I.” Any distinguishable content taken as evidence of the “I” is not the “I” itself, as the “I” stands ready to author more and different content.

The “I” who authors the story has no fixed or even identifiable characteristics, and thus can be said to be transparent. In its transparency it is beyond all identities; it is nonpersonal, nonpositional, and non-narrational. It is more like a ground of being. The appearance of the transparent I and the reality of the transparent I together are paradoxical, for apparently to be real the transparent I must appear, must have some form or content—some dimensionality, some way that it is distinct—yet as *source* “it” has no form, no content, no distinguishing features.¹⁴ It seems that when I go to find my transparent I, I cannot; I only find its footprints, its expression or exhibition—but never it itself. Yet I am sure of its being. (Whenever I say “I am,” do I not attest to its presence?)¹⁵

In a biography of Werner Erhard (the founder of the training program from which the Landmark Forum developed) written by the philosopher William Bartley III, Erhard describes what we are calling the transparent I in these words:

Suddenly I held all the information, the content, in my life in a new way, from a new mode, a new context. I knew it from my experience and not from having learned it. It was an unmistakable recognition that I was, am, and always will be the source of my experience.

Experience is simply evidence that I am here. It is not who I am. I am *I am*. It is as if the Self is the projector, and everything else is the movie. Before the transformation, I could only recognize myself by seeing the movie. Now I saw that I am prior to or transcendent to all that.¹⁶

Sociological and psychological treatments of the self recognize but do not usually elaborate on what we will now call the Transparent I. They differentiate between the I, which they note is spontaneous, undetermined and agentic, and the me, which is socially constructed and determined—reflecting the process of regarding oneself as object and being so regarded by others. Thus two aspects of the self are identified—one is essential, transcendental, the subject of consciousness; the other is transitory, egoic, and the object of consciousness. The social scientific literature concentrates almost exclusively on the second sense of self, self as object. Research emphasis is on socially determined selves—self as known versus self as knower—that is, the part of the self that reflects the world's assessments and evaluations, without acknowledging the interpretive process of self construction. Thus we have “the relational self,” “the conforming self,” “the organizational self,” “the emotionally managed self” (Holstein and Gubrium¹⁷), even the “protean self” (Lifton¹⁸), “transmutable self,” (Zurcher¹⁹) and “saturated self” (Gergen²⁰). These are all recognized in the Forum as selves undistinguished from stories. The Forum, in contrast, focuses on transforming the enculturated, habitual tendency to identify oneself as “me,” so that “I” emerge, free to be, act, and thrive.

The two approaches to the self come together in various wisdom traditions of East and West and in the philosophies of authors who have drawn on those traditions in their work (among the most familiar being Hegel, Heidegger, Buber, Wittgenstein, and in a recent series of typological integrations, Ken Wilbur.)²¹ The philosophy of the Landmark Forum can readily be related to work in these traditions, but as we are showing in these pages, its practice, format, and impact remain distinct.

With practice in distinguishing story from source of story, one's “I” strengthens. This is hard work. It is grueling and exasperating, but also funny and entertaining. In the Forum, acknowledging and recognizing the social me, with its self-serving and seemingly protective judgments, creates humility and identification with humanity in general.²² As the social me is differentiated an opening or clearing appears for the transparent agentic I to appear. In this opening, created by and in the dialogue of the Forum, the transparent agentic I is reinvigorated instantaneously, moment by moment.

Authenticity

The origins of our understanding of authenticity can be traced back at least to Biblical sources.²³ For our purposes, however, as a starting point we consider Charles Taylor's view of authenticity as a modern form of self-understanding arising at the end of the 18th century—part of the “expressivist” revolution he associates with Rousseau and Herder. He writes:

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me.²⁴

In the Forum “being true to myself” entails being true to myself as agentic transparent I, to myself as a possibility free from undistinguished stories with which I have unwittingly identified.²⁵ To develop such authenticity, Forum participants are asked to look closely at its opposite. They are invited to acknowledge their own inauthenticities. They begin haltingly with the mundane, recounting scenarios such as losing a Ping-Pong game to protect the vanity of one's opponent, remaining silent when one should speak up, sending holiday cards to people one dislikes, making insincere compliments. We discover that “looking good” drives inauthentic actions. This exercise is the playful beginning of examining inauthenticity in core relationships and in one's work. Soon revelations of inauthenticities get more serious—e.g., falsifying data, lying to Congress, “killing off” others either literally or symbolically, being untruthful or unfaithful in committed partnerships.

Sharing such inauthenticities in a large group has the remarkable effect of generating collective awareness of our human commonalities. To protect one's own secret inauthenticity is no longer so vital. We see and appreciate our relatedness by acknowledging together our frailties, shortcomings, and self-imposed limitations. In this way not only do participants approach the clearing of possibility again, but also their narrow judgments are weakened and their biased and dogmatic evaluations cede to more generous ones.

Pretense and dishonesty are one form of inauthenticity. A second is not distinguishing story, identifying with one's taken-for-granted drama as described above. Once aware of inauthenticities, Forum participants acknowledge them to the persons with whom or toward whom they have been inauthentic. Acknowledging in this context means taking responsibility. Responsibility is used here not in the sense of

duty but in the sense of recognizing oneself as the author or “source” of one’s actions and ways of being, and therefore the one who is answerable for their consequences—something like saying, “In my life, the buck stops with me.”

In short, inauthenticity is the failure to practice being the source of the stories and meanings by which one’s life is lived. Becoming that source entails realizing that one’s authentic nature is that of the Transparent I. As the Transparent I, human beings live possibility, becoming both more fully human and authentic, as Taylor proscribes.²⁶

Forum participants grasp that their stories occurred in the past. They see from dramatic presentations that without this realization their futures are already pre-laden with the unconstructive impact of these stories. Without “getting” that yesterday’s and yesteryear’s swats and snubs bear no necessary existential relevance, the future has no possibility. Participants begin to appreciate the possibility of creating a regenerated future for their lives, and the possibility as well of living more fully now, by redeeming the present from the grip of formerly undistinguished stories from their past. This “completing the past” is an integral part of practicing being authentic.

Empty and Meaningless

We’ve already touched on the human habit of unwittingly creating meanings that serve both to generate and justify the way we live our lives. On the third day of the Forum the course leader takes this observation to a deliberately provocative, ontological level by inviting the participants to consider the possibility that life itself is empty and meaningless. Initially, participants respond in various ways. If life is empty and meaningless, some say, then nothing matters and we might as well give up. Others are horrified and hold on to their beliefs as sacrosanct. Still others breathe a sigh of relief, experiencing freedom and release from burdens and constraints they see as self-imposed.

The course leader points out that most of these reactions are unrecognized interpretations. The protests result from making “life is empty and meaningless” mean something without accepting authorship of those meanings. The participants are invited to consider that the meanings they are now ascribing to this notion “that life is empty and meaningless” are interpretations that are not inherently meaningful. When nothing is brought to “life is empty and meaningless,” other than the observation that life does not inherently contain prescribed meaning or significance (it just is the way it is), an opening occurs.

Participants can now see the part they have played in interpreting their lives up to now. They can be more authentic about their inauthenticities. To the extent that this occurs, they find themselves in that omnipresent realm of possibility. They experience the “nothingness” of existentialism not as despair but as liberation. As imputed or pre-interpreted appearance drops away, existence can manifest itself simply, directly, as it is.²⁷

When one can consider and experience the possibility that life is empty and meaningless, and that there is no inherent meaning to that possibility, one can invent new meanings that leave one free to be responsible (again in the sense of authorship rather than duty). Such responsibility entails knowing oneself as the author of those meanings. This is transformation, here defined in terms of possibility—that clearing or space from which previously unimagined experiences and ways of being emerge.

This space or clearing appears as one gives up identifying with interpretations that have not been considered interpretations, but reality—the way things really are. In giving up identity one experiences the transparent I—the ground of being. Possibility, transformation, being, and the transparent I converge, and in that convergent space knowledge thrives—knowledge as the opening to continuously arising content rather than knowledge as only a love of existing content. Thus the commitment to possibility in the Forum is a commitment to philosophy as the love of the condition of being open to ongoing arising knowledge as well as being appreciative of existing knowledge (see final two sections below for elaboration of this theme).²⁸

The scope of specific concrete possibilities that arise in the space of the Forum range from the personal to the social, global, and political: e.g., the possibility of harmony with one’s ex-spouse; cooperation and relatedness in one’s extended family; developing community in one’s neighborhood; peace in war torn countries; etc.

Language and Being

Forum participants also have first-hand experience with what social philosophers call “social construction of reality through language” (Anderson;²⁹ Gergen;³⁰ Searle³¹), another academic literature that is not easily available to most people most of the time. That language invents and creates new possibilities through declaration is an ancient understanding. That we understand the declarative power in language (and have invented ways of initiating large numbers of people into it) is more recent.

Participants witness their own social construction of reality when they realize that they habitually assign meaning to nearly everything and then operate as if those meanings were “really real” and completely independent of themselves. They also realize that all the meaning making (social construction) is done with, through, and in language. In contrast with the abstract, conceptual description of this process, as in the social scientific literature, the Forum introduces people to the possibility of distinguishing and challenging their socialized constructions of reality as an ongoing practice. Although the expression “social construction of reality” is not used explicitly in the Forum, considerable attention is given to the ways one’s stories are reinforced socially, and that new and more viable possibilities for one’s life—in family and relationships, at the workplace, and through creative projects or community service—are very difficult to sustain without “enrolling” key people and communities of people in recognizing these possibilities as “really” possible. On the heels of distinguishing stories/interpretations, possibility, inauthenticity-authenticity, empty and meaningless, participants are invited to declare their own beginnings for what is now possible.³² In this way they develop a new relation to both their own lives and to the ways of using language.

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.
—Emily Dickinson³³

When Heidegger said, “Language is the house of being” he meant that while language is not itself equivalent to being, it provides the context in which being occurs.³⁴ We live primarily within a world of words to which Dickinson’s poem attests. How we construct our own “house of being” determines the nature and quality of our lives. And since we create our respective houses primarily in our speaking and listening, the challenge in the Forum, and in life, is to be mindful of the role that language plays.

Integrity and Responsibility

The declarations or futures that participants commit themselves to are not “pie in the sky” wishes and hopes. They are practical changes, which at the beginning of the Forum were unknowable or considered unreachable. Examples of breakthroughs that participants have in fact reported range from personal development to public works: practicing effective parenting; creating satisfying relationships; speaking with ease in public; establishing micro-credit programs; and mentoring and tutoring public school children.

There remains a fundamental distinction that allows declarations to be effective rather than limp and wishful. The course leader distinguishes *integrity*, which is defined as “honoring one’s word as oneself.” By understanding a declaration to be my creation—existing only because of my extant speaking—declaring becomes linked to my very existence. In addition it becomes clear that declarations carry weight only to the extent that I stand for and behind them, as answerable both for carrying them out and confronting the consequences. Integrity and responsibility feed on one another.

Responsibility, we have maintained, entails being willing to consider oneself as the source or author of the interpretations through and in which one lives much of life.³⁵ Frank Seeburger elaborates on this theme by comparing responding to reacting: “To respond, rather than to react, to an event is to issue a rejoinder to the event as it were—a rejoinder in which I give voice to my own uniqueness in answer to the uniqueness of the initial event.”³⁶

Seeburger claims that to respond we must be “completely open and receptive to everything around us, down to its finest nuances and details.”³⁷ To react, on the other hand, is to be at the mercy of old stories. We respond in so far as we transcend such stories in order to be available, first, to what is there, and second, to what is possible. To respond in Seeburger's terms, then, is to create or construct freely, less bound by what we do not know than we do not know. Responsibility, authenticity, and possibility converge.

Conclusion

At the outset we inquired about the promise of philosophy asking, what beyond contents of thought can philosophy offer? Philip Merlan points out that Plato left his interlocutors cross-examined rather than wed to specific content.

What he [Plato] tried to impart was not doctrines—it was something behind them; and this something was never present to him in such a way that it depended only on his own will to impart it to others. And by retracting every expression, by declaring that the doctrine was not his, Plato was retracting it even for himself. He did so to create something anew, thus keeping his doctrines, keeping himself alive.... Perhaps it is this keeping oneself alive of which Diotima is thinking when she speaks of self-begetting. Begetting is the only way in which a mortal being can remain in living and share in the Good forever.³⁸

The Landmark Forum dialogues on possibility, story/interpretation, authenticity and inauthenticity, empty and meaningless, language and being, transformation, integrity, and responsibility lead to the “self-begetting” to which Merlan refers. The self comes to know that when it inadvertently identifies with the contents of thought it loses its freedom and gives up responsibility. It reacts on the basis of identity; it responds by being free from the unconscious control of contents of thought. All forms of content—what appears in consciousness, what has been cognized—can be signs and aspects of reality, but not reality as the source of content. Reality as the source of content is possibility, the-yet-to-be-formed. In recognizing itself as possibility the transparent I is set free from the limits of contents of thought.

To remain free and responsible I must not say I am this or I am that; I say only that “I am.” I thereby orient myself to primordial aliveness that in itself has no content, no form whatsoever. Yet inherent to this formless aliveness is the ability to cognize, to have contents of thought. This orientation to being is a promise of philosophy. With this orientation I am a philosopher—one who loves knowledge, one who loves “being” in which the ongoing arising of content is welcome. Yet I know that I am not that content. Self-begetting, possibility, and responsibility arise from being and being becomes available through self-knowledge.

In aspiring to work in the tradition of Socrates and Plato, Landmark Forum Leaders endeavor to have participants apprehend that the difference this kind of education can make does not depend on the content being delivered, but instead depends on the responsibility the participants are willing to generate by engaging in the inquiry of the Landmark Forum. “Responsibility,” according to The Charter of The Landmark Education Corporation, “begins with the willingness to be cause in the matter of one’s life. Ultimately, it is a context from which one chooses to live.” To be cause in the matter of one’s life is only possible if there are no other causes to which one is ultimately subject. Being cause in the matter of one’s life is a context, for a context is not exhausted by the content it holds at any given moment. As context being ultimately has no form whatsoever, so it must be without causes. In apprehending that you are not your stories and other contents of thought, you become aware of yourself not as “a set pattern of desires and thoughts and resulting actions,”³⁹ but as impersonal awareness itself. This awareness is the context of being, the context from which one can choose to live. This possibility is the promise of philosophy—the promise of the Landmark Forum.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Robert Nozick, *The Examined Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 19.
- ² Plato, *Charmides* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1986), p. 167a2-4.
- ³ Through out this paper the "Forum" refers to the Landmark Forum.
- ⁴ "The Weekend that Changed my life," *Teen*, Vol. 41, February 1997, pp. 72-73; "Empowerment: Son of Est," *The New Yorker*, Vol. 73, 1997, pp.90-91.
- ⁵ Here are two examples. The first is the study by Yankelovich and Associates, available through Landmark Educational Corporation, 353 Sacramento St, San Francisco, CA 94111. The second study, "A Shortcut to Motivated and Adaptive Workforces," is available from The Talent Foundation, www.talentfoundation.org, 19 Buckingham Street, London WC2N 6EF.
- ⁶ Dennison, Charles W., "The Children of Est: A Study of the Experience and Perceived Effects of a Large Group Awareness Training (The Forum)," November 1994, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Denver.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Peter Finkelstein, Brant Webegrat, and Irwin Yalom, "Large Group Awareness Training," *Annual Review of Psychology*, 1982, 33:515-39.
- ⁹ Karen Hopper Wruck and Mikelle Fisher Eastley, *Landmark Education Corporation: Selling a Paradigm Shift* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 1997); David C. Logan, *Transforming the Network of Conversations in BHP New Zealand Steel: Landmark Education Business Development's New Paradigm for Organizational Change* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Marshall School of Business, 1998).
- ¹⁰ William Warren Bartley, III, *Werner Erhard: The Transformation of a Man: The Founding of est* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc./Publishers, 1978).
- ¹¹ Lou Marinoff, *Plato, Not Prozac! Applying Philosophy to Everyday Problems* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1999).
- ¹² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 174.
- ¹³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).
- ¹⁴ In some accounts, Buddhism presents a similar perspective; see Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, *As It Is* (Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1999), 75-77, 83-86.
- ¹⁵ See Georg Kulewind, *Stages of Consciousness* (West Stockbridge: Lindisfarne Press, 1984), p. 38.
- ¹⁶ Bartley III, *Werner Erhard*, 167-68.
- ¹⁷ James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium, *The Self We Live By* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- ¹⁸ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993).
- ¹⁹ Louis A. Zurcher, *The Mutable Self* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977).
- ²⁰ Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic, 1991).
- ²¹ Ken Wilber, *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The Spirit of Evolution* (Boston: Shambala, 1995).
- ²² Other ways to strengthen the "I," or what some call "witness" include meditation, Yoga, and voluntary high risk adventures, as described by Richard G. Mitchell, Jr., *Mountain Experience: The Psychology and Sociology of Adventure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- ²³ See for example, Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947-48).
- ²⁴ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 30.
- ²⁵ This entails awareness of one's social identity, as well as the possibility of choosing to confirm it authentically.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-41. Taylor argues that in addition to being true to myself, authenticity includes horizons of significance, that what I am true to must have significance independent of my will. The discussion of authenticity in the Forum does not explicitly deal with the issue of horizons of significance.
- ²⁷ This realization is similar to what is meant by awakening in Buddhism. See Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, *As It Is* (Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1999), 83-86.
- ²⁸ This claim about the Landmark Forum is supported by survey research completed by the Talent Foundation (see endnote number five above). According to their study, page six, "Based on our findings, it appears that readiness to learn can be developed through short interventions, such as the one evaluated in this research [the Landmark Forum]....The course in question [Landmark Forum] produced radical and sustained change in the way individuals relate to their own development."
- ²⁹ Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).
- ³⁰ Kenneth J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- ³¹ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
- ³² See John Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) p. 26.
- ³³ Thomas H. Johnson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960) pp. 534-35.
- ³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977), p. 193.
- ³⁵ The course leader speaks of being willing to operate from the interpretation that I am cause in the matter. The Charter of the Landmark Education Corporation says: "Responsibility begins with the willingness to be cause in the matter of one's life. Ultimately, it is a context from which one chooses to live."
- ³⁶ Frank Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 176-177.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 177..
- ³⁸ Phillip Merlan, "Form and Content in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 8 (1927), p. 423.
- ³⁹ Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, *I am That*, (Durham: The Acorn Press, 1973), 222.